



NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

Developing an Effective Media Campaign Strategy

National Center for School Engagement

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An initiative of the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children

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When the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) sent out requests for proposals to sites interested in becoming demonstration programs for truancy reduction, they required five main strategies to be developed. One of these key strategies was a public awareness campaign. The National Center for School Engagement has worked with each demonstration site as they developed these public awareness activities. Summarized in this report are some of the best media campaign strategies.

Everyone at one time or another has been exposed to or affected by a public awareness campaign/communication campaign. A campaign can be defined as a coordinated communication effort that is conducted through the mass media, interpersonal communication or some combination. Whether one takes notice or not or makes behavior changes is directly related to the effectiveness in which the message is delivered. For example, simply reading a brochure with the message “Buckle Up” is unlikely to bring about any noticeable individual or social change. However, campaigns that include a diverse mix of other media vehicles are more likely to influence people to make choices in line with the campaign information. Formulating an effective media campaign is essential to the success of the message.

Below are the basic questions that need to be answered to develop a plan for an effective media campaign. The following questions can be a useful first step:

- ***What goals do you want to accomplish?***
Pinpoint very specifically the action and/or awareness that you want your target audience to adopt.
- ***Who is the target audience?***
The target audience is a segment of a population that will receive the media message. Carefully dissect the population into the target category by profiling the audience to better understand their attitudes, knowledge, and behavior. Knowing what the target audience thinks about the issue at hand and where they obtain information will play an important part in determining appropriate media channels used in delivering your message.
- ***What messages will bring about the desired change or outcome?***
Message development is of utmost importance. The root message should come from quality discussion and brainstorming. The root message also should position your goal in a unique and appealing way to the target audience. Choose more than one message (but no more than three) to prevent staleness and to encourage a view from different angles. Suggestions for message development include: interviews, surveys, focus groups, and piloting materials with the target audience.
- ***What media channels will be the most efficient and cost-effective?***
There are several categories of mass media: News media includes television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and periodicals. Advertising and public service announcements may involve print, radio, television and billboards/bus boards.

Public affairs events may include rallies, conferences, and speeches. To help inform the decision of which type or types of media to use, be aware of where the target population gets its information, which channels are most/least believable, what your budget will support, and what will provide adequate “dosage” of the messages on a regular basis. Building and maintaining relationships with local media will aid in better results during a campaign.

- ***How will progress be monitored?***

There are two common evaluation techniques to consider for evaluating a public awareness campaign: process and outcome. A process evaluation will ask questions such as “how is the implementation going?” or “are we meeting benchmarks”? An outcome evaluation will focus more on the number of people reached or how behavior has changed. Through ongoing evaluation measures, you will know

- whether your messages and supporting materials are being seen,
- whether your messages are perceived to be credible and plausible, and
- whether your messages are affecting behaviors.

It is recommended that you document comments and anecdotes about what people are saying regarding the campaign. Be aware of influences that may alter the meaning of the messages or that may cast suspicion on the campaign or campaign sponsors.

An example of an extraordinary public awareness campaign currently being demonstrated is Jacksonville United Against Truancy (JUAT) in Jacksonville, Florida. JUAT’s main goal is public awareness and the reduction of truancy. The National Center for School Engagement interviewed Shelley Grant, Director of Youth Offender Programs for the State Attorneys Office, and invited her to share thoughts about their public awareness campaign.

What was the goal of JUAT’s public awareness campaign?

- Public awareness, first and foremost.
- Dispell misperceptions that truancy is “skipping school for a day at the beach” or that it is inconsequential or harmless.
- Truancy is not just a student problem; it is parents who keep their children home, preventing them from getting an education.
- Relate what truancy really is today and then help people understand that there are serious consequences to it. A lot of parents don’t know the laws regarding truancy. Specifically, if parents keep their kids out of school they could be prosecuted.

What worked? What are some of the successes that the campaign has enjoyed?

- The first day of school campaign has been successful through the years. When school first began earlier in August there were 10,000 children missing the first day of school. In the last couple

of years it has been in the hundreds - thousands and thousands less than it used to be. The campaign has certainly proven effective just by looking at first day of school attendance.

- JUAT is responsible for establishing Truancy Awareness Month in October.

What were some of the types of media and products used?

- A successful campaign needs something to draw students to the table. The use of lanyards, stickers, and pencils has worked in the past. Now with the new theme of Count Me In For Learning, we have Frisbees, calculators, and pencil pouches.
- A brochure puts something in their hands that they can hold onto and read later.
- Outlets and events are things like Back-to-School rallies and fairs, places where there are going to be children and parents who need information about school. These are places we focus our attention on always providing information at event tables.
- PSA's were produced that were of fair quality. Unfortunately, they are very expensive to do and we couldn't afford to buy airtime so the PSA's were running at 2 am and 4 am. [Editor's Note: Public Service Announcements are announcements that inform the public about a community service. These announcements are sent to the media (radio, television and print) at no charge. Typically, one cannot designate times that the messages are aired. However, if the media is approached as a sponsor of the message better air time is often awarded.]
- One year, a couple weeks prior to school starting, we had information flashing on the screen at local movie theatres about school starting and the importance of being in school on a regular basis.
- During the 2nd year of the campaign, an art class at one of the local colleges was given a class project to develop a sign for the sides of buses in Jacksonville about truancy. One young woman designed a picture of a bus passing by very quickly and it said "don't miss the bus to your future". This ran on buses for several months and seemed to be very effective.

What are some of the challenges and barriers of a media campaign?

- As a state agency, not having the expertise in the marketing field has been difficult in terms of graphics, press conferences, timing, and having the connections.
- Also, as a state agency, not always having the funds to do what you want to do. [Buying ad time on] Television is cost prohibitive when you operate on a grant.
- Trying to focus on the positive side of truancy. “Gloom and doom” is the nature of the business in a state attorney’s office. Creating a message that doesn’t focus on the negative can be challenging.

Talk more about the collaboration efforts that go into this campaign. Who is involved?

- The Chamber of Commerce has been very involved in the last few years in the back to school efforts.
- The school system appears to be fully on board with the new Count Me In For Learning campaign.
- In the past, Burger King has provided coupons for free Whoppers for students.
- Burger King and BellSouth have provided funding for the campaign.
- Winn Dixie, a local grocery store, has supported back to school efforts by placing event fliers in grocery bags.

Were media efforts evaluated? What was found?

- Parent surveys were administered and questions were asked regarding knowledge of truancy laws and motivation for getting kids to school. The responses indicated that a large portion of parents are knowledgeable about the laws and that those laws are quite motivating to get their children to school. Based on those findings, the Public Awareness campaign does seem to be getting the word out.
- Media attention around parental arrest is two fold. On the one hand, it is negative attention for the parent; but on the other hand it delivers a powerful message to other parents. It is reported that the state attorney feels this is the only offense that media attention is worthwhile because it lets other parents know this can happen to you if you don’t send your children to school.
- The number of children who miss the first day of school has been reduced by thousands as seen by looking at day one attendance records.

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



National Center for School Engagement

NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research about youth out of the educational mainstream conducted by CFFC. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

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Special Thanks to: Shelley Grant, Program Manager
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